Supporting Special Education Teachers and Increasing Student Achievement Within the Valley School District

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved August 2015 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2015

ABSTRACT

This mixed methods study examined how a high-poverty urban school district implemented four initiatives to support special education teachers and increase student achievement. The initiatives that were implemented consisted of direct instruction teaching methods, the use of a district-approved curriculum, monitoring program fidelity with walkthroughs, and increased professional development opportunities.

Quantitatively, the study compared walkthrough data and student achievement scores. The walkthrough data was collected from 52 special education teachers employed at the 19 schools making up the district while teaching reading and math. Student achievement scores were collected from the students taught by the 52 special education teachers. The walkthrough data compared the percentage of students making academic growth on district assessments with the percentage of teachers implementing the district initiatives with a high level of fidelity. Data was collected and analyzed between the first and third quarters of the 2013–2014 school year.

Qualitatively, six special education teachers were interviewed to examine their thoughts on the change process and to determine their needs to be successful as they continued to implement the district initiatives.

The results of the quantitative data indicated that students demonstrated growth as walkthrough scores increased in 16 out of 19 schools, specifically in the area of math. Fidelity to the initiatives increased throughout the year as teachers began to use and implement the initiatives.

The results of the qualitative data indicated that special education teachers positively responded to the support they received through the Special Services

Department and the district's initiatives. Using grounded theory, it was determined that teachers need opportunities for collaboration, feedback, and time to practice in order to be successful.

Lastly, the epilogue discusses the next steps that are being taken by the district to support all students with their learning needs.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to all those who live with understanding, compassion, forgiveness, and love in their hearts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. Kathleen Puckett, for her tireless commitment and support of me throughout this journey. Dr. Puckett continuously met with me over many years always offering support and suggestions to help me become a better person and a better writer through her example. I would like to thank my committee including Dr. Margarita Jimenez-Silva and Dr. Stephen Lawton for their time and efforts in supporting and encouraging me.

I would also like to thank my family. My mother, Margaret, sister Mara, sister Theresa, and brother Nick, believed in me since I began this program in 2009. The kindness and compassion shown to me is humbling, and I am very grateful.

I would also like to thank Hadya for encouraging me to begin this program in 2009. I am very blessed to have started and completed this program. I have learned about myself, and I have learned what is important in life—to help others.

I would like to thank my colleagues with whom I work who have stood by me and believed in me. Our director of special services, Dr. Sanchez, is as a true example and role model of putting students first and believing in them, and Mary is one of the kindest friends I have known.

Lastly, I would like to thank my friends from Sts. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church. His Grace, Bishop DANIEL for his prayers and compassion, Luka for his editorial advice and support, and everyone who kept me in their prayers.

A quote that I've always liked is "the journey is the reward." I can say that since I have begun this program in 2009, my whole attitude and outlook on life has changed. Thank you.

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Introduction

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), a division of the United States Department of Education, has changed its accountability system from monitoring compliance to focusing on results. This new system is based on the vision of Results-Driven Accountability (RDA). RDA looks at the results or outcomes of special education students along with a plan that each state has created to support students receiving special education services. In response to this change in accountability, Arizona's State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Reports include a State Systematic Improvement Plan (SSIP) with a specific State Identified Measureable Result (SIMR) or goal. Arizona's goal is to improve student outcomes in reading for students with disabilities.

RDA has resulted in a statewide initiative within Arizona known as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). This initiative is designed to determine the needs of students who are performing below grade level in reading and math. MTSS is represented as a triangle divided into three parts or tiers. Tier 1 includes grade-level instruction and support for all students. Tiers 2 and 3 include increasing amounts of small-group or individualized support for students whose academic performance is below grade level. MTSS provides opportunities for students to receive research-based interventions, such as direct instruction. These intervention programs may include placement tests, small-group instruction at the instructional level of the student, and consistent collection of student data. The instructional level of the student may not be the same as the grade level of the student; it is determined by the academic skill-set that a

student currently possesses as determined through use of screeners and/or academic placement tests. In the case of students requiring academic support and special education services, the students' instructional level may be multiple grades below grade level.

Arizona has enacted a MTSS initiative to support and improve all students without waiting to go through the referral process for special education services in order to begin receiving instructional level support. Formerly known as the Response to Intervention (RTI) model, this initiative empowers schools to create interventions, supports, and strategies that are both unique and differentiated to meet the diverse needs of students whose data demonstrates that they are not showing grade level or instructional growth. As a result, districts within the state now have the capacity to create school-wide MTSS. Using procedures developed within the MTSS, teachers and administrators may continuously review data to measure student growth and to evaluate the effectiveness of systems that are currently in place within that school site.

MTSS helps educators to collect and examine student data. Educators may use this data to determine which students are not meeting grade-level standards and require remediation in content areas such as reading, writing, or math. Students may receive small-group support throughout the day using intervention programs that meet the instructional or ability level of the students while teachers continue to collect data through mastery tests, informal assessments, or independent activities. Teachers may use this data to discuss next steps for students who are not making growth during the small-group support.

Arizonan students are involved in these interventions based on their immediate needs. Eligibility within MTSS is not based on special educational qualification, the

referral process for special education services. It is proactive and immediate. Schools have intervention programs in place for students whose data demonstrates that they are testing below grade level. These intervention programs place the student at his current instructional or skill based level in reading and math. The student will work on becoming proficient and mastering instructional level skills. The programs slowly incorporate higher level skills which are also mastered by the student through consistent practice and repetition. The outcome of these programs is to close the gap between the grade level and instructional level of the students. This state initiative encourages districts to combine the requirements of RDA with MTSS to support special education teachers and increase student achievement by providing research-based interventions.

Local Context: Valley School District

The Valley School District (VSD) is a high poverty district located in a large urban area of a major city in Arizona. This district has a high number of non-English speaking students and parents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Hispanic families make up over 75% of the ethnic population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). The average annual median salary earned by residents living in certain areas of this community is $14,300 (City-Data, 2013). All students receive free breakfast and lunch every day through a school-meal program. The VSD serves approximately 18,900 students in over twenty schools. The VSD is an elementary school district, with students attending from kindergarten through eighth grade. The district has a high number of students who have a primary language other than English. The staff collaborates and plans together to meet the needs of the students in what the district refers to as a professional learning community.

In this study, special education teachers within the VSD do not have their own special education classes. The students who receive special education services have a general education homeroom with a general education teacher. The special education teacher creates a schedule when the students will either come to a separate room for "small-group" specialized instruction, or the special education teacher may go into the general education classroom to provide specialized instruction. Special education teachers dialogue and discuss student needs and supports collaboratively during times for team collaboration.

The students who receive special education services in this study have disabilities ranging from "specific learning disabilities," "other health impairment," "autism," or "emotional disturbance." These students have the cognitive ability to take standardized assessments at the district and state level.

Professional Learning Community

All educators within the VSD collaborate in grade-level teams. Since 2007, educators working in the VSD have embraced the district view as members of a professional learning community (PLC). Educators in a PLC focus on student learning, collaborating in teams, and using data to measure student progress (DuFour, 2010). The VSD has collaboratively established a mission statement: "to ensure high levels of academic achievement for all with a focus on learning tailored to the individual needs of all students." The VSD also has a vision, which is to:

> Focus on results, collaborating to meet the unique learning needs of every child by closing the achievement gap and exceeding state and national standards to ensure high levels of academic achievement for all with a focus on learning tailored to the individual needs of all students.

Through the collaborative process of a PLC, the Valley School District is setting a plan to address the federal vision of RDA and the state initiative of MTSS.

Results-Driven Accountability and MTSS

One way the VSD has responded to the federal vision of RDA and the state initiative of MTSS is by gathering and examining data. Data are collected through assessments. These assessments are given at the end of each nine weeks of school. The VSD utilizes a test-building program in order to determine if students are making instructional growth and/or meeting the grade-level standard. This program is called Galileo.

The VSD uses this assessment-monitoring program to create district assessments in reading and math. This program allows educators to access a variety of questions that are based on Arizona state standards. These questions may be used when creating assessments based on specific academic standards.

As students takes the district assessments throughout the year, they receive two scores, a proficiency cut score and growth score. These scores measure two different types of student growth. The proficiency cut score is used to determine if the student is in the range of meeting the standard when compared to state criteria. The growth score is the score that is used to determine if the student is to be classified as "adequate," i.e., to demonstrate one year's instructional growth when compared to previous growth scores aligned to statewide criteria

These two scores are used to indicate a student's overall growth in a proficiency growth index. The *Proficiency Growth Index* (PGI) for each student is charted using a foursquare analysis that displays this data by quadrant (Appendix A). The top left

quadrant one refers to students who are meeting the proficiency target but not making one year of instructional growth. The top right quadrant two refers to students who are meeting the proficiency target and are making one year of instructional growth. The bottom left quadrant three refers to students who did not meet the proficiency target and are not making instructional growth. The bottom right quadrant four refers to students who did not meet the proficiency target, but are making growth.

The PGI helps the staff of the VSD predict student performance on the state achievement test. It also determines which students are not achieving sufficient growth and is used to plan steps for supporting those students. All teachers can access the data from the foursquare analysis by logging in through a secure website to view an automatically created foursquare analysis for students on their class roster or caseload.

Through the collection of group data, the VSD teams are able to determine which specific students are not making growth within a specific group. This allows the team to know which students are struggling and may be eligible for additional support or services.

Special Education in the Valley School District

The VSD presently uses MTSS to determine appropriate levels of intervention-based instruction for students who qualify for special education services in reading and math. These interventions meet the needs of the students at their instructional level. Results are measured and viewed through their relationship to the PGI. The PGI supports the teachers when analyzing student growth. Students who score within quadrant three are targeted in the MTSS as requiring a tier three intervention.

The Department of Special Services within the VSD provides support to all special education teachers and students within the district. School leaders within this department collaborate and develop action plans and goals designed to increase student achievement. The VSD adopted a framework to include capacity building, quality of instruction, and a clear system of support (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). The department of Special Services in VSD has used these goals to develop initiatives to provide support for staff to result in greater academic success and student achievement for all students.

In order to meet these goals, the Special Services Department implemented four new initiatives beginning in September of the 2013–2014 school year. These initiatives align with the district mission and vision statement of meeting the needs of the students individually. These initiatives affect only the special education teachers, not the general education teachers of the schools within the VSD. The initiatives are:

- Using a direct instruction intervention program based on the instructional level needs of the student
- Using district approved curriculum and materials with fidelity while monitoring the data to evaluate student achievement
- Using program walkthroughs to monitor and support the implementation of the direct instruction intervention program
- Providing designated support staff within the direct instruction program with professional development opportunities and trainings during the school day

The following sections describe each of the four initiatives.

Initiative 1: Using a Direct Instruction Intervention Program

Students requiring support receive intervention using a direct instruction program. These students are those identified by assessment scores that show no instructional growth or grade-level mastery of academic standards, placing them in quadrant three of the proficiency growth index. The direct instruction program targets math and reading skills based on the instructional need (ability level) of the student. This type of instruction starts with the administration of a placement test to determine the starting point for the intervention. A direct instruction lesson starts by stating the objective of the lesson, modeling the process to meet the objective of the lesson, ensuring all students are participating in the guided practice, and checking for understanding from all students (Rosenshine & Stevens, 1986; McDonald & Elias, 1976). Teacher modeling, guided practice, and checking for understanding is referred to as the "I Do, We Do, You Do" method. The teacher models the lesson and the students work through the lesson together followed by a check for understanding. This helps to maximize classroom instructional time and to keep all students engaged and on task throughout the lesson. The particular direct instruction programs used by this district have scripted lessons for the teacher to follow. When using a script, the teacher directs and questions a small group of students who answer together.

Initiative 2: Using District-Approved Curricula and Materials with Fidelity

District-approved materials include a program from one publisher. This program is for students who require intervention in reading and math. The program has differentiated levels of rigor based on the instructional level of the student. Teachers are given materials based on the needs of their specific groups. These materials are used

with students whose data and test scores demonstrate the student requires instructional support. Reading direct instruction materials target skills from letter sounds, decoding, phonics skills, comprehension skills, and reading fluency. The direct instruction materials for math focus on achieving mastery of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The program also collects student performance data every day by monitoring how students work on assignments included in the program. Teachers meet to review student progress within the group. This data are reviewed to monitor the effectiveness of the group and to see if the group is meeting the needs of the student. Individual students who may be struggling within the group may receive additional supports based on team discussions.

Local setting on district-approved curriculum and materials. To note, at the time of this study, the VSD only had purchased and distributed new math direct instruction materials to all special education teachers. The VSD was unable to purchase and distribute new reading direct instruction materials to all special education teachers during the 2013-2014 school year. The VSD did have older editions of direct instruction reading materials that teachers could use; however not all teachers had access to these materials. As a result, special education teachers were still expected to teach a reading lesson based on trainings received on direct instruction, but they were not expected to use the district-approved curriculum while teaching reading.

Initiative 3: Program Walkthroughs

Program specialists from the special services department monitor the implementation of direct instruction approaches and materials approaches in tier three interventions on a weekly basis by observing classrooms and recording evidence of

implementation using a walkthrough form (Appendix B). This rubric captures a snapshot of direct instruction occurring during the time of the walkthrough. The walkthrough process is not meant to evaluate the teacher. Data from the walkthrough rubric is used to look for trends occurring throughout classrooms in the district and to determine future ideas for professional development and to celebrate areas of success. The walkthrough scores once compiled become an aggregated measure of fidelity of implementation.

Program specialists enter walkthrough scores into online spreadsheet, each of which is specific to one of the schools within the district. Results are displayed in pie charts showing the percentage of direct instruction occurring at each scoring point (one through five). These results are aggregated for each school and do not indicate scores for individual teachers

Initiative 4: Professional Development Opportunities and Trainings During the Day

The VSD Department of Special Services employs a variety of specialists, trainers, and teacher leaders to assist teachers with implementing district initiatives. They meet with the special education teachers on a monthly basis for professional development. The professional development opportunities include relevant topics from the data gathered from walkthroughs, teacher-submitted questions, specialized training with using the direct instruction program, working collaboratively as a team, analyzing and collecting student data, and using data as the basis for student-centered conversations.

Statement of the Problem

The proficiency growth index has indicated that a high number of students who are receiving special education support are not achieving desired instructional growth.

The VSD has established new initiatives to address this problem, but as with any new initiatives, the district is determining the extent to which the changes are influencing student achievement, how well the changes are being implemented, and the supports that teachers are requiring to sustain the reform efforts.

Teachers need support to ensure that these changes continue through the remainder of this year and into future school years. As an evolving PLC, the VSD's special education teachers are able to offer suggestions based on problems that arise as the initiatives are implemented. Their suggestions could be used to plan further professional development measures and future steps of staff collaboration.

The aim of the Special Services Department is to continue implementing multifaceted and systematic initiatives. To do so effectively, the VSD's problem, which is the focus of this study, has two components:

1. To determine the attitude of teachers (as part of a professional learning community) as they learn and implement the initiatives of the Special Services Department; and
2. To determine to what extent these initiatives have influenced student achievement.

Purpose of This Study

This study's principal objectives are to examine the extent to which the initiatives of the Special Services Department are benefiting student achievement and to determine what types of support are necessary to assist teachers with implementing these initiatives as members of a professional learning community. The first problem examined in this study is that students receiving special education services are making limited

instructional growth. These students remain in the quadrant three classification of growth on the PGI. They are not meeting their instructional growth goals or the grade-level standard.

The second problem examined in this study is that teachers are being asked to change their instructional approach and teaching style and to begin using a district approved curriculum and direct instruction program. They are being given a new program along with new expectations. These programs and expectations require their current style to be changed dramatically and for teachers to begin to buy-in and take ownership of the program. The feedback from walkthroughs is designed to improve their fidelity and use of the program. The expectation is that all special education teachers are using this program with fidelity, and the walkthroughs help to monitor this implementation.

The Special Services Department within the Valley School District is implementing these four initiatives to support the teachers and increase student achievement, thereby addressing the two problems. This study seeks to determine the success of the initiatives of the Special Services Department, determine supports that teachers require, and provide recommendations for further professional development and training during the following school year.

Answering these questions provides a rationale to teachers about the effectiveness of the new programs being used and how they are affecting student growth. It also helps to build up a rapport with teachers to create buy-in and ownership of the program.

Research Questions

1. How have teacher's attitudes evolved throughout the year, and what do teachers need to be successful from the Valley School District in the classroom?
2. As teachers develop their Levels of Use with district initiatives as measured by walkthroughs, has an increase of fidelity by the teachers resulted in a decrease of the number of students testing into the third quadrant of the proficiency growth index?

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine initial results of the Valley School District as it undertakes the federal vision and state initiatives of Results-Driven Accountability and MTSS. This study analyzed student growth and determined the attitudes of teachers within the Valley School District as it moves towards increased student achievement. The focus of this research is to examine student achievement and to hear the voice of the teachers during the process. The findings can support the leaders of the Special Services Department to determine if these initiatives were effective in the Special Services Department data goal to reduce students falling far below the standard by ten percent. These findings will indicate the extent to which the efforts of teachers, when acting within the district initiatives, have yielded positive results for their students with special needs.

This study will provide teachers with an opportunity to provide feedback based on their perceptions of using direct instruction in the classroom. It will also provide the

district's administration with information on professional development opportunities and trainings for the next school year.

Organization of Dissertation Chapters

This dissertation consists of five chapters and five appendices. Chapter 1 established the significance of the study, the background of the school district and the Special Services Department, as well as what is happening during the 2013–2014 school year. Chapter 2 contains a review of literature based on Results-Driven Accountability, Common Core State Standards, Multi-tiered Systems of Support in Schools, Direct Instruction, Teacher Change, Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) with Levels of Use, the Professional Learning Community, and Grounded Theory. Chapter 3 outlines the methods used to address teacher support and to examine the results of instructional and support initiatives on student achievement. Chapter 4 contains the findings of both the teacher interviews and data regarding student achievement. Chapter 5 states the summary and conclusions of the research. There is an Epilogue included after Chapter 5 which explains district innovations that have occurred since the culmination of this study. The seven appendices provide supporting data referenced in the five chapters.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

This section presents a review of the literature based on the Common Core State Standards, Multi-Tiered System of Support, Direct Instruction, Professional Learning Communities, and supporting teacher change through the Concerns-Based Adoption Model. When put together, these items create a framework used to increase student achievement at the Valley School District.

Results-Driven Accountability

The United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education is shifting the focus of its efforts from monitoring compliance to monitoring outcomes. State agencies are tasked with auditing and reviewing paperwork such as Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Currently, IEP paperwork containing special education goals and services are written and submitted with compliance rates of over 95% (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The present compliance rate represents an increase from 79% five years ago. In spite of this progress, students with special education goals still have not shown an increase in their ability to read with proficiency; OSEP (2012) estimated that just 36% of U.S. students with special education services were reading with proficiency as of 2010.

Student outcomes do not appear to be increasing even though schools are complying with paperwork submission regulations, meeting their other goals, and providing services. The OSEP has created a new educational system called Results-Driven Accountability to address this problem by requiring states to be accountable for the learning outcomes of their students and maintain special education paperwork

compliance. Results-Driven Accountability will place greater emphasis on the states to establish systems for measuring and supporting student achievement in reading and math.

Common Core State Standards

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council for Chief State School Officers developed the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). These groups worked alongside teachers, administrators, and educational leaders to create a clear framework for preparing students to enter careers and higher education.

The CCSS consistently explained student expectations for learning between kindergarten and the twelfth grade across the United States. The CCSS follows a clear and consistent design that includes higher-order thinking skills and allows students to discuss and prove their responses (CCSSO, 2010). Currently 45 states have adopted the CCSS (CCSSO, 2010).

The CCSS states student learning expectations for each grade level. Core concepts are taught in early grades to allow the students time to master these concepts. The CCSS standards also are designed for equality of all students in order to be prepared to meet the expectations of colleges and careers (CCSSO, 2010).

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support in Schools

When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) was reauthorized in 2004, it created an expectation to create a systematic process for supporting students who are struggling in school (IDEA, 2004). In turn, school districts began to create processes for monitoring student learning. The MTSS model (previously referred to as the Response to Intervention model) was developed as a way for educators to take collective responsibility for what each student is learning (International Reading

Association Commission on RTI, 2009). The MTSS uses research-based interventions, consistent progress monitoring, and data collection and analysis efforts to drive all decisions regarding student progress (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2006).

The MTSS model is not a special education program; instead it addresses students in the general education classroom and strengthens the instruction while consistently following up with interventions based on available data. Students who are working on a specific intervention will have outcomes based on curriculum-based measurements (CBMs) which can best be described as the expected outcomes of planned lessons or interventions (Deno, 1985). Curriculum-based measurements are data-driven and look at student progress over a period of time (Skinner, Neddenriep, Bradley-Klug & Ziemann, 2002).

Prior to the MTSS model, special education referral and placement was one way to provide a student with additional support. This resulted in special education staff struggling to provide the effective and meaningful services their programs were designed to provide (President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002).

MTSS is a plan of intervention that is individualized and based on research-based instruction (Dexter & Hughes, 2011). Teachers will have specific times embedded throughout the day to focus on targeting specific skills. As data demonstrates student mastery in specific skills, the teachers will determine whether to continue interventions in other specific academic skills (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010).

The MTSS model is systematic. A plan exists within the school for all students to attend an intervention class. Students and staff recognize intervention as a time to serve

everyone. This helps to de-stigmatize the attitude that only lower performing students receive intervention (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Schools using an MTSS will have systematic interventions for students who are underperforming as well as supports or enrichment opportunities for higher performing students. These systems are proactive with ongoing assessments, teacher monitoring and reviewing data, having student-based conversations, and having a plan in place to support students who are demonstrating that they are in need of support regardless of whether they are traditionally underperforming or higher performing students. This is significant as high performing students may choose not to admit that they are struggling because they may not want to be seen as not being successful (Dweck, 2006).

The MTSS model is a based on three tiers of support. The academic support and interventions increase based on the needs of the student (Rudebusch, 2007). The first tier of MTSS involves consistent screening and progress monitoring for the entire classroom. Students receive instruction to the CCSS standards and receive benchmark instruction using district adopted core curriculum (Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013). Regardless of ability level, tier one support addresses the learning of all students based on the Common Core standards (Hale, Kaufman, Kavale, & Naglieri, 2006).

The second tier of MTSS is comprised of students who have been identified as needing additional support through grade level or district created screeners or common, grade-level assessments. These students begin to receive strategic interventions using a supplemental program or instruction according to specific skill deficits. Students receive grade-level instruction in the general classroom and may also receive small-group

instruction based on their instructional level. Documentation of student progress determines the effectiveness of the intervention (Hale et al., 2006).

The third tier of MTSS provides intensive individualized support for students who have not shown improvement through tier two supports. Tier 3 supports use research-based interventions that focus on specific skills and small groups are pulled out more frequently and for extended periods (Hale et al., 2006).

Direct instruction is a type of research-based instruction. It is used in Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions to support students who are having difficulty with learning specific skills in reading or math.

Direct Instruction

As MTSS is implemented in the school, a direct instruction intervention program allows students to demonstrate mastery and show instructional level growth in reading and math by targeting specific skills and teaching these skills to mastery (Anderson, Evertson, & Brophy, 1979; Good & Grouws, 1979). An intervention program that uses direct instruction empowers teachers to be effective and efficient by using consistent language, actions, and procedures. This may include the use of repetition and modeling. This repetition and modeling creates fidelity. Fidelity creates clear expectations for both the teacher and student (Archer & Hughes, 2011). While direct instruction can be a generic term describing a procedure, it can also refer to a specific intervention model of teacher-directed instruction involving some type of scripted material. These scripted materials, usually developed commercially, are intended to increase student learning and student mastery by maximizing instructional time and achieving 100% mastery during the lesson (Grossen, Carnine, & Silbert, 2000).

The term direct instruction was coined as early as 1893, when Rice (as stated in Shannon, 1989) found that students spent over half of their educational day working independently. Rice observed that after the teacher finished with direct instruction, students completed activities and assignments on their own for large amounts of time. Opponents of direct instruction call it *authoritarian* due to the rigid pacing, use of signals, and whole class responses (Walker & Hops, 1972). Others consider direct instruction similar to taking information from the head of the teacher and placing it into the head of the student (Brown & Campione, 1990). Opponents tend to favor a student-centered approach where the students choose their learning and the teacher acts as a facilitator in the learning process (Smith, 2013).

However, teachers who use direct instruction techniques in the classroom to assess performance, provide feedback, and have the whole group practice together generally make instructional gains in student achievement (Rosenshine & Stevens, 1986). Direct instruction has increased student growth in reading when used four or more days every week (Grossen, 2008). Direct instruction has shown increases in the reading rates of students with limited English proficiency (Gersten, Brockway & Henares, 1983) and struggling special education students (Arthur, 1988).

Direct instruction requires clear objectives, explicit teaching, teacher modeling and questioning, guided practice, and checking for understanding in order to be effective (Schmoker, 2011). Teachers can use direct instruction to help ensure that students are learning by modeling, practicing, and verifying whether the student is making sense of the lesson (Schmoker, 2013).

Direct instruction supports student engagement and increases the time spent on task—a vital consideration when one realizes that students may spend over two hours of their school day not engaged in the classroom instruction (Anderson & Walberg, 1994; Haynes & Jenkins, 1986). A teacher-led group can also make a positive impact on student achievement in basic skills. Increased opportunities provide for clear explanations, modeling, practice, feedback, and frequent responding improve these basic skills (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Students achieve at higher rates when they receive direct instruction compared to working on a task with limited teacher instruction (Rosenshine & Stevens, 1986).

Direct instruction increases academic learning time, which is to say time that the student spends on-task and engaged in the learning process (Caldwell, Huitt, & Graeber, 1982). Student achievement can also be supported by maximizing academic learning time (that is time in which the student is successfully engaged in an academic task) at the appropriate level of difficulty (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Direct instruction is a group activity allowing students to learn from each other as well as from the instructor.

A group setting does not require an entire class to be effective since small-groups may be more useful when breaking a larger class up into specific intervention-based skills (Brophy & Good, 1986). This allows for increased practice, increased repetition, and specific monitoring of student responses. Teachers found that it was more effective for them to teach groups of six to eight students than it was for them to teach individuals by themselves (Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, Moody, & Schumm, 2000). These students have opportunities for peer interaction and to practice related skills including taking turns, listening to others, being respectful, and contributing to the group.

Research supports the idea of using direct instruction to teach basic concepts and skills that are the prerequisite for mastering complex tasks. Direct instruction has a positive effect on students who require multiple reading interventions (Fredrick & Steventon, 2003) and supports special education students (Kinder, Kubina, & Marchand-Martella, 2005). Becker and Gersten (1982) found that low-income students who received direct instruction outperformed students who lived in the same area from each other, only a few blocks away.

One direct instruction package that may be used by schools is published through Mc-Graw Hill. It is called SRA (Science Research Associates). This package contains multiple intervention programs that target reading and math skills for students of all ages. Programs may include SRA Corrective Reading, SRA Reading Mastery, SRA Corrective Math, or SRA Connecting Math Concepts. These intervention programs contain different levels. The use of a placement test will support the teachers to know which level is appropriate for the student. Depending on the level, the intervention program will target instructional level skills through spiraling of 80% review and 20% new material in each lesson. Teacher materials consist of a presentation book, which outlines each lesson. Student materials consist of student workbooks and hardcover student books (Englemann, Hanner, & Johnson,1999a, 1999b).

Teacher Change

Demant and Yates (2003) conducted a survey of primary teachers regarding their experiences with direct instruction. Their survey found that 81% of the teachers expressed a generally positive attitude toward direct instruction and that the teachers who expressed a generally positive attitude were able to recognize the components of direct

instruction (e.g., objectives, teacher modeling and questioning, and verification of understanding).

In order to implement direct instruction effectively, teachers must receive training that includes coaching with a mentor and follow through on data collection with progress monitoring (Grossen, 2004). Teachers who undergo training in a workshop setting may end up practicing with their peers and form the impression that direct instruction is robotic or lacks autonomy. This impression, however, is incorrect because in-class coaching with a mentor allows teachers to see that effective direct instruction requires all students to participate and demonstrate mastery in the lesson, keeping the lesson engaging for all students in the group (Grossen, 2004). Mentors model direct instruction lessons and then team-teach with a teacher to support teacher use of direct instruction (Grossen, 2004).

Teachers can also use the data they receive from ongoing assessment efforts to monitor the effectiveness of direct instruction. These reports can serve as a measure of accountability for both the students and the teacher in maintaining fidelity to the program (Grossen, 2004). Reports can provide information about the rate of student progression through daily lessons and explain how students suffer difficulty with attaining mastery (Grossen, 2004). Progress monitoring can be used to establish incentives for the student or plan for changes based on student performance.

When new initiatives are implemented, teachers may have a range of feelings regarding how these changes will affect them, their students, and their overall classroom routine. Supervisors can categorize teacher concerns and then determine ways to provide

support to the teachers during the change process. One way to do this is through the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (Hall & Hord, 2011).

Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM)

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) helps supervisors and leaders understand the processes that a school district uses to make changes. The model helps school systems incorporate new programs and initiatives into a school's operating model by addressing two key areas: Stages of Concern and Levels of Use.

Using the CBAM process allows a school district to look at an initiative and examine its components, track progress, report findings, design interventions, and measure the impact of its implementation. The CBAM offers teachers an opportunity to discuss their feelings regarding an initiative and validates their concerns.

The CBAM views change as a process rather than as an event. Teachers can receive ongoing support while their teaching practices and data are examined. The CBAM allows for coaching and follow up on teacher attitudes, reactions, and feelings as they relate to the change process.

Stages of Concern are measured using a questionnaire to determine the teachers' attitudes, reactions, and feelings about new initiatives in a school district (Hall & Hord, 2011). The *Stages of Concern* questionnaire also examines individual teacher's feelings about and interest in the change process. It consists of four main categories (Hall & Hord, 2011):

1. Unrelated: the teacher has no interest in the change
2. Self: the teacher is more concerned about how the change will affect them. Teachers are thinking about their skill level to complete the task and what others will think of them
3. Task: the teacher is more concerned about learning how to complete the new task or initiative
4. Impact: the teacher can see the impact that the new initiative will have on students in the classroom

The *Levels of Use* process examines the ways in which a teacher uses initiatives in the classroom. A series of interview protocols are used to determine these levels. The teacher may only be thinking about using the initiative, or he or she may be using the initiative in a mechanical way. Others may be beginning to refine the initiative specifically for their classroom. There are eight Levels of Use that separate teachers into groups of *nonusers* and *users* (Hall & Hord, 2011; Appendix C).

Teachers will implement direct instruction at various levels of use based on their prior knowledge and familiarity with this type of instruction. Their stages of concern will shape their initial attitude toward using direct instruction. As teachers continue to receive training and support using direct instruction, their position among the stages of concern and levels of use may change.

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

A PLC is a group of professionals who collaborate and share responsibility for supporting students. Teachers who work collaboratively are more likely to increase student achievement (Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1995). This is evidenced by a strong

correlation between the professional commitment of teachers and student performance (Bobbett, Ellett, Teddlie, Olivier, & Rugutt, 2002). Teachers who work collaboratively express more satisfaction and are more willing to initiate changes in the classroom (Hord, 1997).

A professional learning community offers an opportunity for individuals to be heard and not ignored (Hall & Hord, 1987). This helps to ensure that individuals support the change as active participants and members of the community (Fullan, 1993). When teachers work together, there is an opportunity to share knowledge and experience (McLaughlin, & Talbert, 1993). A professional learning community allows its members to celebrate their work, identify problems, and suggest solutions (Senge, 1990). Teachers and administrators must be learners who look for solutions (Kleine-Kracht, 1993).

A PLC looks at four guiding ideas to determine student learning (DuFour, 2010):

1. What will students learn? The Common Core State Standards define what a student is expected to learn within his grade-level.
2. How will the teacher know that the student has learned the material? Teachers will create common assessments to measure if the student understands the material he or she has learned.
3. What supports are in place when a student is struggling? If a student is having difficult, what supports are in place to assist with learning?
4. How will enrichment occur for students who already understand the material? What type of extension activities will be planned for students who may already be proficient in the material?

The teachers and staff who are part of a PLC work collaboratively and collectively by grade level (DuFour, 2010). They schedule common planning times weekly or daily to develop lesson plans and discuss student achievement. Teachers are able to discuss strategies to support students who are having trouble as well as students who require enrichment. Teachers also increase their efficacy as they collaborate, thus resulting in more support for the students and the adoption of new classroom initiatives (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a methodology that may be used in qualitative or quantitative research (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). It may begin with a question in mind or a series of data i.e., interviews, surrounding a topic. The voice and attitudes of the participants tell the story of the data as it is being analyzed. Grounded theory is based on discovery. There are no preconceived thoughts and the voice of the interviewees tells the story. The story is analyzed by listening for specific data sets including similarities or trends between the participants (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). These data sets are then naturally developed into codes, concepts, categories, themes. A theory is organically extracted upon analyzing the available data which may include transcripts from interviews (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

Grounded theory may look at diverse populations of individuals who share a common element, e.g., How have individuals dealt with loved ones dying in hospitals? (Cauhapé, 1983). Grounded theory is also used in social fields including education, management, and manufacturing. It enables researchers to collect a diverse range of

opinions and thoughts from a wide variety of individuals who work within a common field (Fletcher-Watson, 2013).

Grounded theory differs from positivist research. Positivist research begins with a theory already in mind and this theory is tested with data (Crowther & Lancaster, 2008). Other types of traditional research begin with choosing a theoretical framework and then collecting data that will either support or negate the topic that is being examined (Creswell, 2003).

Conclusion

The review of literature discusses the many layers of accountability needed to increase student achievement. The Valley School District's Special Services Department has incorporated these layers of accountability into its operating model in order to focus on outcomes and examine results.

The initiatives of the Special Services Department align with the district's philosophy of a professional learning community, the state initiative of MTSS, and the federal system of Results-Driven Accountability to increase student achievement. By examining data, educational leaders can identify the extent to which these initiatives have affected student achievement and make informed, data-driven, decisions about future intervention programs.

The district has chosen to use direct instruction as its principal intervention program for supporting students who require instructional level, skill-based support in reading and math. This intervention program has resulted in changes occurring throughout the classrooms of special education teachers within the district. By interviewing teachers about this new intervention program and other district initiatives

such as walkthroughs, professional development, and the use of district-approved curricula with fidelity, educational leaders can identify the types of supports that are necessary to implement these initiatives. These interviews will be analyzed through grounded theory methodology, listening to the voice and attitudes of the naturally develop.

Chapter 3

Methodology

General Background

The purpose of this study is to examine how the Valley School District has responded to federal and state initiatives so that, as a professional learning community, the staff can implement specific district-level initiatives to meet the needs of the students with special education services and to support teachers who are instructing the students. There are two parts to the methodology.

1. To qualitatively examine teacher's attitudes through a series of interviews.
2. To quantitatively examine walkthrough scores of teachers and student achievement scores from district assessments.

Research Questions

1. How have teacher's attitudes evolved throughout the year, and what do teachers need to be successful from the Valley School District in the classroom?
2. As teachers develop their Levels of Use with district initiatives as measured by walkthroughs, has an increase of fidelity by the teachers resulted in a decrease of the number of students testing into the third quadrant of the proficiency growth index?

This chapter outlines the collection and organization of the data. The study used mixed methods and focused on collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data consisted of teacher interviews. The quantitative data consisted of student assessment scores and teacher walkthrough scores.

The study received approval from Arizona State University and the Valley School District prior to the commencement of research efforts. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Arizona State University approved the formal protocol to carry out this study. In addition to IRB approval, the administrative team of the Valley School District granted the researcher formal approval to conduct and carry out research within the school district after he developed and submitted a district *Consent to Conduct Research* proposal.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data was collected through a series of teacher interviews.

Setting

The teacher interviews took place inside classrooms belonging to teachers employed by the Valley School District. These classrooms were located at multiple school sites.

Participants

Six special education teachers participated in the interview process. The teachers represented the following campuses within the school district: 1) a kindergarten through fifth grade campus, 2) a kindergarten through eighth grade campus, and 3) a sixth through eighth grade campus. Teachers who agreed to participate in the interviews were given a written document explaining the purpose of the study and their role as an interviewee within the study. Teachers were extended the right refuse or withdraw from the research process at any time they desired.

The researcher is an educator employed within the school district and recruited teachers based on a sample of convenience from schools that were part of the researcher's caseload. He is a member of the special services team that has helped to provide the

training and implementation of the district initiatives. The researcher chose interviewees who work alongside him on a daily basis.

Interview Protocol

Three sets of interviews were used to obtain needed data. The interview protocol contains the questions that each participant was asked during the three sets of interviews (Appendix D). The first interview consisted of seven open-ended questions. The second and third interviews consisted of three open-ended questions.

Procedure

Eighteen interviews were conducted between March 2014 and May 2014. Participants were given access to the questions listed in the interview protocol prior to each interview. The interviews were conducted in person at each interviewee's classroom. The researcher digitally recorded each interview and stored the audio files on a secure server. A company specializing in transcription services transcribed the interviews into a word processing document, which was also stored on a secure server.

Data Analysis

The researcher used a grounded theory approach to analyze the qualitative data obtained from the interviews. While the researcher was invested in the implementation of the program, the researcher objectively looked at the responses with no preconceived notions or prior knowledge.

The response and voice of each participant was the driving force of the coding and analysis of the interviews. The attitudes and perceptions of the teachers were naturally told throughout each of their interviews.

Four main trends began to naturally develop. The researcher created a spreadsheet listing the four main trends for coding purposes (Appendix E). Specific quotes that reflected teacher's attitudes towards each trend were copied and pasted from the transcripts to the spreadsheet during the coding process. These quotes were coded either with a 1, 2, 3, or 4 that corresponds to these naturally developing trends. The quotes were then organized into a system showing the progression of how teachers felt at the beginning of the year to how they felt at the end of the year.

These quotes were used to create themes for each of the four trends. Each theme encapsulates the teachers' attitudes regarding that specific trend. The four themes were then analyzed to create a theory that reflects the overall attitudes of the teachers in the sample group regarding their attitudes and what they need of the Special Services Department.

Quantitative Data

The findings of the quantitative data were obtained from two protocols: student achievement data and mean scores of teacher walkthroughs. The data collection process maintained the anonymity of the students and teachers by including the removal of all student names, teacher names, names of schools, and any other type of identifiable information.

Procedure

Protocol #1—Student achievement data. Student assessment scores were accessed through an online database managed by an assessment company that has served the Valley School District for more than eight years. Data were accessed online through a secure username and password.

Student achievement data were displayed in proficiency growth index table (PGI table). The PGI table displays student data in four quadrants. Quadrants one, two, and four demonstrate some growth, either grade level and/or instructional. Quadrant three demonstrates no growth. The data from quadrant three, which identifies students who are not making instructional or grade-level growth, were specifically analyzed.

PGI tables from 52 special education teachers throughout 19 schools within the district were examined. Each PGI table included the scores from students who were receiving direct instruction from special education teachers.

Differences in the number of special education students whose PGI remained in quadrant 3 between the first quarter and third quarter were analyzed for reading, for math, and for reading and math.

Procedure for compiling the findings of protocol #1. The researcher created PGI tables for each special education teacher and organized the teacher entries by school. These tables contained the reading and math scores of the students during first-quarter and third-quarter assessments. Both the number of students and the percentage of students who scored in quadrant three during first-quarter and third-quarter assessment were recorded in a spreadsheet (Appendix F).

Protocol #2—Mean of teacher walkthroughs. The researcher used an online spreadsheet to access teacher walkthrough scores from quarter three to examine the Level of Use of teachers. Scores of four and five indicated an above average implementation of the initiatives of the VSD. While walkthrough scores were collected throughout the year, only walkthrough scores from quarter three were included in the analysis in order to align with the third-quarter post-assessment. The online spreadsheet listed each school's name,

the subject (reading or math) observed, and walkthrough scores in the four observable areas (clear learning objective, teacher modeling, guided practice, and checking for understanding). Teachers could receive scores of one through five in each of these four observable areas.

Procedure for compiling the findings of protocol #2. Teacher walkthrough scores were anonymously collected and sorted by school into reading and math categories. The mean score (represented as a percentage) was calculated by dividing the total number of walkthroughs at each school by the number of *fours* and *fives* received at each school. This process resulted in the mean scores representing the percentages of walkthroughs scoring a four or a five at each of the 19 schools in this study. Fours and fives were chosen as they represented an above average Levels of Use in relation to teachers incorporating the initiatives of the VSD. The mean scores were calculated for both areas: reading and math.

Data Analysis

Data from protocol one listed the increase or decrease of students scoring in quadrant three between the first-quarter assessment and the third-quarter assessment at each school in this study. Data from protocol two listed the mean (represented as a percentage) of the walkthrough scores receiving a four or a five at each school in this study during quarter three. Schools were listed and the data was statistically examined using linear regression analysis.

Regression analysis. Regression analysis is a statistics-based process for predicting relationships among variables. This study used linear regression to look at the relationship between two variables that have been found using protocol one and protocol

two. Three statistical techniques (correlation, *x*-*y*-scatterplot, and slope) were used to analyze this data.

Correlation. Correlation is a statistical technique that examines the strength and direction of a relationship between two variables. The researcher chose to use this statistical method because the data that resulted from protocol one and protocol two could be paired. A positive correlation ($n > 0$) states that if one variable increases, the other variable increases as well. A negative correlation ($n < 0$) states that if one variable gets bigger, the other variable become smaller. A correlation of zero shows a weak or limited relationship between two variables.

In this study, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to measure the strength of the linear relationship between the two variables. The statistical formula used to determine the correlation coefficient is $r = \frac{\sum(xy)}{\sqrt{\sum x^2 \cdot \sum y^2}}$ and the variables are:

- Variable 1 (x)—The mean percentage of teachers scoring a four or a five on the walkthrough rubric during quarter three (reading and/or math)
- Variable 2 (y)—The change in the percentage of students who fell into quadrant three from quarter one to quarter three-district assessment (Reading and/or Math)

XY-scatterplot (chart with trend line). An *x*-*y* scatterplot shows a relationship between two sets of data that are paired and graphed based on their position along the x-axis and the y-axis. In this study, the x-y scatterplot was based on the following:

- X-axis: represents the mean percentage of teachers scoring a four or a five on the walkthrough rubric during quarter three for each of the nineteen schools

- Y-axis: represents the change in the percentage of students in quadrant three between the first-quarter and third-quarter district assessments for each of the nineteen schools (as measured by reading and/or math) results

A trend line in the *x*-*y* scatterplots showed the general direction that the data points seem to be heading.

Slope. The slope is a measure of the steepness of a line. The slope states how much the *y*-axis increases as the *x*-axis increases. The slope is a regression line that shows the change in the *y*-variable as the *x*-variable changes. As the *y*-variable is dependent on the *x*-variable, the slope predicts values of *y* given *x*. The formula for determining the slope is: $\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{\square}(x_i - \bar{x}) \cdot (y_i - \bar{y})}{\sum_{i=1}^{\square}(x_i - \bar{x})^2}$

In this study, the slope was determined by taking the *x*-variables and the *y*-variables and applying the above formula. The data from these two variables was combined and calculated to determine the slope. The slope predicted how much the change in the percentage of students in quadrant three was influenced by the percentage of teachers scoring a four or a five on the walkthrough rubric.

Limitations

As an employee of the school district where this research took place, the researcher exercised caution to limit his biases regarding the topic and to curtail any influences that they might have had on the participant answers. He accomplished this by maintaining fidelity to the interview questions, maintaining a neutral tone during the interview process, and reviewing the consent to conduct research with each participant.

Summary

This chapter has described the qualitative and quantitative data collected in this study and the methods used to compile and analyze it. The data has been compiled and organized into Chapter 4. The findings contained therein may be disseminated to district office leaders, the state and local boards of education, special education teachers, and at presentations held during educational conferences.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter is organized in terms of the two research questions. It will first report the qualitative findings of the first research question, which asked, "How have teacher's attitudes evolved throughout the year, and what do teachers need to be successful from the Valley School District in the classroom?" This chapter will then report the quantitative findings of the second research question, which asked, "As teachers develop their Levels of Use with district initiatives as measured by walkthroughs, has an increase of fidelity by the teachers resulted in a decrease of the number of students testing into the third quadrant of the proficiency growth index?

Qualitative Findings

The interviewer analyzed and coded interview data by looking at the voice of the interviewees. Their voice throughout the interview led to four trends to stand out. These trends are referred to in the research as themes.

1. Theme 1: *Teachers' attitudes have begun to show an evolution of their teaching practices and are using a direct instruction based intervention program in their classrooms.*
2. Theme 2: *Teachers have changed their attitudes and methods for planning lessons and monitoring student achievement.*
3. Theme 3: *Teachers' attitudes have become more accepting of walkthroughs, support, and feedback based on the walkthrough rubric.*

4. Theme 4: *Teachers find collaboration and professional development to be useful in their own planning as well as being part of a professional learning community.*
5. Theory on perspective of teachers involved within this study: *Teachers in the Special Education Department at the Valley School District are open to implementing a new intervention/direct instruction program when given support through feedback, opportunities for collaboration, and training.*

The following section examines specific quotes from the teachers within this study that have been used to develop the aforementioned themes and theory.

Findings of Theme 1

Teachers have begun an evolution of their teaching practices and are using a direct instruction based intervention program in their classrooms.

This theme developed as teachers self-reflected and developed their teaching styles to incorporate a direct instruction intervention program. As teachers began to implement direct instruction, they noticed their classroom structure evolving based on the program. One teacher stated, "After implementing the SRA, I think it's taught me some new strategies as far as how to have the students involved. Also, it's taught me some small tricks or strategies on how to correct the behavior in the classroom." A second teacher stated that the strategy of using a hand signal between directions helped her keep students answering together and on signal. A third teacher stated,

> It's changed in that respect, that I am more repetition [I Do, We Do, I Do, We Do] than I am moving from this objective to the next objective, following a pacing guide. It's evolved [to] where I feel like I am more open to change than I was before, especially with the objectives—referring to the objectives throughout my lesson….This is [after] 20 years of teaching, and you're still learning.

Two teachers had already been implementing the basics of direct instruction. One of them received training during a past in-service and explained that the retention of information was often supported by the use of repetition and keeping students engaged. The other teacher had been using direct instruction based on mandates already in place at her school, saying,

> I feel I was really familiar with direct instruction. It was a movement they had implemented here at [my school] anyways. We were supposed to do a lot of modeling. We were supposed to do a lot of—like the 'I do' and then the 'We do.'

The ideas of a direct instruction model were not new to some veteran teachers. A veteran teacher had used direct instruction throughout her career, explaining, "I've been using direct instruction(s) a lot, all through my teaching years. In (comparison) with the initiatives of Special Services, I don't see a difference, just reinforcement of using the direct instruction." This teacher had received training and used intervention programs based on ideas of direct instruction in previous years. She further stated that it was very important for her to check students' understanding to gauge how well the lesson went for the day.

Some teachers initially felt conflicted when began to change their teaching styles, but they later began to notice positive impacts on student engagement and see the benefit of the direct instruction model. One teacher expressed a conflicted opinion regarding the scripted style of the direct instruction program, explaining, "It's [my teaching style] changed because I've been using the math program, and it's scripted. I feel like I lost my teaching style because I have to follow the script." However, the teacher followed up to say,

> I think some of my kids, especially with attention issues, have difficulty paying attention and being engaged just because it's so structured and it goes—I have to read everything word for word. Other students are really engaged because they know that they need to focus more on it. They're more engaged with it that way.

Student engagement increased as they began to develop routines for using direct instruction and the new routines led teachers to feel more efficient during daily lessons. Teachers have also noticed students responding more frequently and participating more openly in class after they began using direct instruction. A teacher from the middle school states,

> Since implementing [the SRA program] I feel efficient. Therefore, the way I deliver my instruction to the students, I think that reflects on the way they perform. [I have] increased collaboration with homeroom teachers. I think they [students] responded to it really well because it's predictable. Once they [students] got it, their reaction was, 'Oh, I get it,' or 'I got it.' It's very specific and targeted to their need. It reflects on their more positive attitude and also more willing to do this [SRA]. I see their engagement also, more engaged.

In summary, the findings of *Theme 1* show that teachers are beginning to see change within their classroom routines, change with how students respond, and change their teaching practices in the classroom.

Findings of Theme 2

Teachers have changed their methods for planning lessons and monitoring student achievement.

This theme developed as teachers self-reflected on their scheduling and planning processes and their interactions with students and general education staff. A significant challenge of using the direct instruction program was creating a schedule to fit the individualized needs of the students. One teacher stated, "Scheduling is always a challenge when you implement these initiatives at different time intervals." Another

teacher spoke of the scheduling process, “It’s just your typical making time to give the placement tests and getting the schedule redone and things like that, but other than that, I didn’t really have any concerns.” This teacher felt that the district’s decision to roll out these initiatives after the start of the school year had caused challenges including editing and revising student schedules and moving students into different groups. This required the teacher to change the way she planned for lessons and collected data on her students.

Lesson planning is something that teachers needed to change during the year. Teachers were issued new materials and needed to familiarize themselves with these items, and as a result they began changing a new lesson planning processes. Using direct instruction has resulted in teachers maximizing their lesson planning time. As one teacher stated,

> For planning, I typically like to try and plan for the SRA lesson a day or two in advance. Then, I look over the next lesson and—I look over the next lesson and create objectives, which I write on the board so the students can see it, and I can see it as well. I go through each lesson and mark off each one that we have completed.

Another teacher stated, “I’ve been using it [planning time] to look through my three different SRA levels and looking at the lesson plans that they provide. Then, the objectives and what I’ll be teaching for each lesson.” The time spent on meaningful lessons within the classroom has increased as the teacher and the student use the program consistently. Teachers gather a lot of daily data for each student by using workbooks, mastery tests, and fluency tests, each of which can help them monitor student achievement on a daily or weekly basis. One teacher felt that,

> Most of my students have improved, especially in math this year, because of the SRA math. I think they’ve really gained a lot of listening skills as well as math skills just because they have to listen in order to be able to do it.

Student confidence increased as they began to demonstrate mastery in lessons and pass mastery tests. Monitoring student achievement has also resulted in increased trust and confidence between the teachers and students while using direct instruction. Another teacher observed how this trust and confidence occurred in her classroom, explaining,

> Do it on a daily basis. Work directly with the student. You build up the relationship with the student. If you work directly with the student, you build up that relationship. You build up that confidence. 'Oh, Teacher can help me.' Or, 'Teacher can answer to my questions if I go to her.' You develop that trust. You develop that partnership. You develop that relationship with your student. You develop that connection, which is really good for the students to come to your room confidently.

An elementary teacher noticed that the specific script has made her lessons very specific and focused. She stated that the students understood what was expected of them in the classroom, explaining,

> Students have become more confident in their growth that they show. I think the program, because it's specific and direct, I think it leaves very little room for students not to be engaged in what we're doing. When we're delivering the instruction, it's actually our job to make sure that everyone is engaged. There is no time to be distracted because it's one skill, one goal, one specific target.

As conversations regarding student progress occur between the special education teacher and the general education teacher, the data revealed that students are making growth outside the special education classroom.

One teacher observed that increased student achievement, participation, and effort in small-groups has resulted in increased performance in the general education classroom. One teacher stated, "I've noticed my students—most of my students' math scores have went [sic] up a lot since I started using the SRA math." This teacher elaborated in a further interview,

> Most of my students have improved, especially in math this year, because of the SRA math. I think they've really gained a lot of listening skills as well as math skills just because they have to listen in order to be able to do it.

Special education teachers have been discussing student achievement with other special education and general education colleagues by using the data they have collected. General education teachers have seen student achievement increase within their classrooms as well. Teachers discussed assessment results in terms of a student "approaching" or almost achieving the standards, "meeting," which is achieving the standards. An elementary teacher had a data celebration as she stated,

> The most recent and very accurate sample [of data from a student] is the results that I got from one of the teacher[s] from the classroom that all the students seen by us, they met in math and they approached in reading, which is a big success. For the fourth quarter, being fifth graders, they met everything in math and they approached everything in reading, which is great. I'm really proud of that.

Another teacher discussed her collaboration with general education staff, stating,

> A lot of my general education teachers that I work with have noticed a big gain in math skills in the classroom because of the [direct instruction] Math, that it's building [bridging] the gap more between what they don't [know]—or what they need to know.

A middle school teacher stated how the students are independently using the strategies she practiced with her students during a lesson,

> When I've observed student data, during the time that I was teaching the SRA, the students sometimes are asked to do independent work. What I've noticed is that some of the students are actually starting to get the hang of the math word problems, but the few that are not, it just seems like they're not really paying attention or they're just going quickly through each problem.

She continued, "The conversations that I had with the reading teacher, he explained that with the reading assessments, the Galileo, that the kids have done better this year compared to last year." These teachers have seen students begin to

independently apply strategies to solve math problems and to apply these strategies into the general education classroom.

In summary, the findings of *Theme 2* show that teachers are using their planning and preparation time differently, having data-driven conversations with other teachers and maximizing the instructional time they spend in the classroom.

Findings of Theme 3

Teachers have become more accepting of walkthroughs. Teachers value the feedback based on the walkthrough rubric because they use the feedback to self-reflect and improve their teaching practices.

This theme developed as teachers self-reflected on walkthroughs in the classroom. Walkthroughs from teacher leaders within the Special Services Department occurred throughout the year. Teacher interviews have revealed that the walkthrough format evolved throughout the school year.

Teachers noticed that the purpose of the walkthrough form evolved over time. At first, the purpose of the walkthrough forms was unclear as the process of filling them out was new for everyone involved. One teacher feels, "[I would like] a bit more support in terms of the walkthroughs that are provided with a more comprehensive evaluation with feedback on areas of things to improve." In a subsequent interview later in the school year, the teacher states, "The feedback that we have been receiving is helpful. I hope it doesn't stop because it's always helpful to hear someone else." This teacher felt that the feedback was most important because it offered her an opportunity to self-reflect on her teaching style. Another teacher stated,

> I think having more feedback through the walkthroughs and the direct instruction, like how I'm doing with it, would be beneficial to me to know how I'm doing and what I can do to better improve how to do it.

Teachers felt that the limited feedback offered at the beginning of the walkthrough initiative was not productive because there were no reflection opportunities.

Another teacher described the walkthroughs prior to offering feedback, stating,

> The walkthroughs, yes, I agree with the walkthroughs as soon as we get the feedback right away to know how to work on, what to improve. We need that feedback. Everybody needs the feedback. I need to know what I did wrong, what I did good, to keep up the good, to eliminate or alleviate the bad. At the same time, to alleviate the stress, because it's stressful not to know, because I didn't get the feedback.

She continued to state, "We need, like kids, we need positive—they need positive praise. They need the words. They need motivation to keep up the good job. The same thing with us because at one point you get drained." This teacher felt that the feedback provided by those walking through the classroom was able to validate instructional practices and offer ideas for her to consider.

Another teacher felt that knowing exactly how to write an objective or having specific feedback to a concept made things clear for lesson planning and teaching. She stated,

> I liked at the end where we were getting some specific and direct feedback personally. Even though I don't know how it all works with evaluations and things like that. It's always nice to know exactly what you're doing right, and then being able to take that to refine it. Instead of, I need a better objective…

In summary, the findings of *Theme 3* show that teachers are embracing feedback as a tool to support them to improve their instructional practices and to increase their fidelity when using the direct instruction program.

Findings of Theme 4

Teachers have found collaboration and professional development to be useful in their own planning as well as being part of a professional learning community.

This theme developed as teachers self-reflected learning and sharing ideas as a professional learning community. Teachers said they saw benefits in collaborating and sharing ideas with others using direct instruction during professional development opportunities. One teacher felt that the collaborative nature of meeting together as a department helped to clarify the bigger picture for all of the teachers working together while using the direct instruction program. It also helped to clarify the PLC expectations for everyone involved. Regarding the professional learning community process, a teacher stated further,

> Having this collaboration with the [special education] teachers, also with the general education teachers, helps to know and to know the big picture—- not just work with the individual alone. Just to work as a group and everybody to be involved in there. Everybody to be involved. Everybody to be motivated. Everybody to be aware of the expectations because all [these] assessments are reflections of our expectations, and also collecting these assessments and collecting this data, it's a reflection of our work—what type of work we are doing in the classroom—and it's a reflection of our effort. That's what I think about this.

One teacher stated how she believes a plan for the next school year should be made at the end of the current school year. She stated that this would help with the planning process and preparing for new students who will be using the direct instruction program. When reflecting on preparation and getting to know her students, one teacher said, "As far as the direct instruction, the more preparation prior to initiating with the students for next year, I think it'd be good if we devise a plan for all the kids." She then

said, “I would like to have a little more guidance on how to plan for next year’s new students for the SRA.”

Another teacher addressed the efficacy of collaborative meetings and stated, “I think this year the meetings that—the professional developments that we’ve had with [the supervisor], they’ve all been productive. As long as we have meetings like that, that are productive, then that’s all I need.” This teacher feels that effective meetings provided ideas to think about and implement right away in the classroom.

An elementary teacher felt that there should be a mutually agreed-upon list of direct instruction expectations. These should be consistent and constant throughout all the schools and adopted by all of the teachers within the district in order to make expectations clear for everyone. She stated, “All teachers should be trained to apply direct instruction and to incorporate this direct instruction consistently, not just on and off or here and there.”

One teacher felt that having trainers, refresher trainings, and data collection trainings helped her improve her teaching practices. She discussed the different types of trainings she would like to have access to during the next year, saying, “I would say more training on looking at the data that SRA provides. Then, I want to use direct instruction in reading in the classroom, which I know I think we’re going to be doing next year.”

Regarding the ongoing training, one teacher felt she had received enough training and necessary materials. She stated that she was ready for feedback and said,

> I think we have enough [training]—I think we have all the materials we need. Just support us. It could be in a conversation[al] format or [it] can be with notes that the person comes and takes and then we tal[k] about certain points on that.

Three specific points brought by up teachers as collaboration continues into the next school year included writing support for students with special education services, how to support students who join a direct instruction group mid-year, and long-term planning for monthly special education meetings.

1. Teachers stated that writing is a serviceable area for most of the students with special education services. One teacher questioned what type of training will be provided for direct instruction in writing. This teacher stated,

   > Maybe what direct instruction would look like for writing for our students? I know that now because there's the written piece of the SRA, I've been thinking more along lines with that for their writing 'cause then that way they're getting direct instruction on how to use their phonics knowledge to spell words. Most of my students can't—[they] are unable to do that, so that's a good goal for them, so I don't know if that's what writing would look like.

2. A teacher observed that she had several new students transfer into her class from outside the district throughout the academic year. As a result, these students are not familiar with direct instruction expectations. The teacher has noticed a change in the pacing of the lesson and has to teach the basics of the direct instruction program to her new students. The disruption of the lesson routine frustrates other students. This teacher wants to see examples and ideas for supporting new students entering the classroom since any seamless transitions that can be made for the new learners would enhance the learning environment for all the students. She stated,

   > I guess it's [sic] maybe help[s] with figuring out what to do as new students come along. I can't keep creating new groups because you just run out of time, so trying to figure out ways to use the program the way that you're supposed to but also—I don't know—find a place for it, like new placements or students that transfer in or things like that.

3. One teacher would like to have a calendar set up with specific topics for monthly meetings. She said that this will help her anticipate the plan for each meeting and come prepared with questions specific to the topic that will be covered. She also feels that specific agendas for each meeting need to be sent out to all teachers in advance. She believed that knowing what will be modeled ahead of time helps all the involved teachers prepare better. She stated,

> When we have those Thursday meetings, okay, we're gonna [sic] focus on modeling and objective. Then show what good objectives look like, and maybe model the modeling. Then maybe the next time, show—I don't know. I know that sometimes people need to see it. I know what the lesson's supposed to have, but then to see it in action. It makes a little more sense. That might be helpful.

In summary, the findings of *Theme 4* show that teachers see value in the collaboration time that is embedded within the school day and any professional development that has a purpose because they can take it back to their classrooms and apply it to their daily routines.

Grounded Theory Analysis

As the voice of each participant emerged throughout each interview, the story told by the interviewees indicated that professional growth occurred. Initially, the interviewees spoke to the changes in teaching and routines. However, in time, the story told by the interviewees indicated an evolution of teaching practices, a positive change to their teaching methods, the use the walkthrough form to self-reflect professionally, and collaborate effectively during meeting times as a PLC. The voice of the interviewees naturally emerged a theory that states teachers within the VSD are willing to try new

things when given support through feedback, opportunities for collaboration, and training.

Qualitative Summary

Teachers have evolved from a survivor or "all about me" mindset to a PLC—a work together attitude of collaboration and using walkthroughs, training, and feedback as a constructive opportunity to try new ideas, reflect, and keep going. The four themes were combined into a theory of teachers being willing to implement new things when given support through feedback, opportunities for collaboration, and trainings. Feedback is important to teachers. Opportunities for collaboration have allowed special education teachers to discuss progress with general education teachers. Trainings have given special education teachers time to meet together at a professional learning community and to think about continued support for the upcoming year.

Quantitative Findings

The findings of this study show a relationship between higher walkthrough scores and a lower number of students within the third quadrant of the PGI. This relationship was determined using the following method: Two *x*-*y* scatterplot graphs were created to show the relationship between the difference in the percentages of students scoring in quadrant three and the percentage of teachers scoring a four or a five on the walkthrough rubric. The correlation, slope, and number of schools that decreased their percentage of students in quadrant three are stated below each graph.

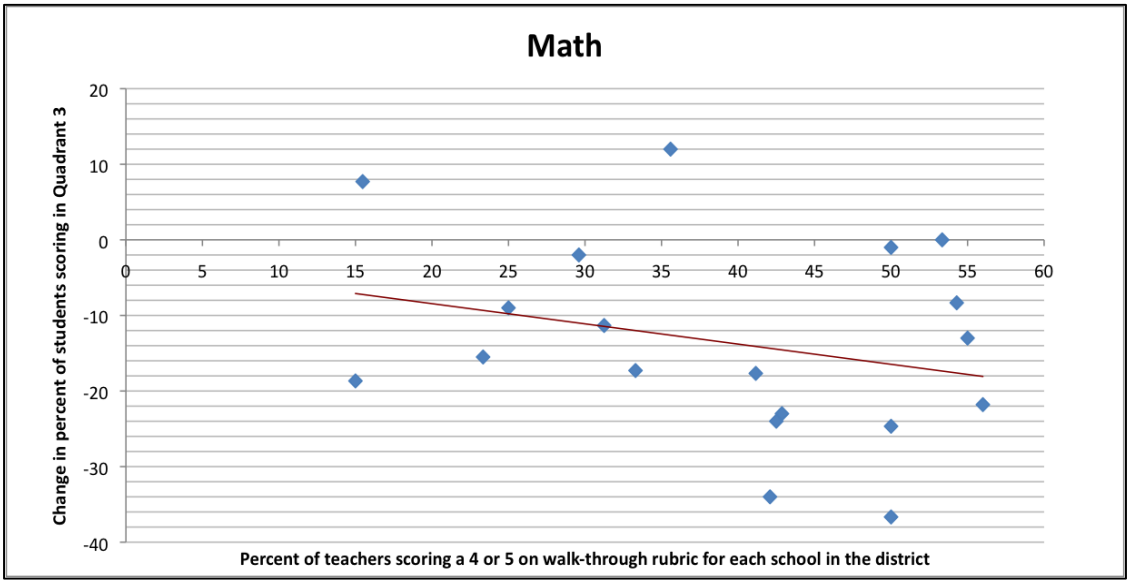

Figure 1. Math walkthrough scores and student performance. Relationship between walkthrough scores and change in the percentage of students within the third quadrant of PGI in math between the first and third quarters of the 2013–2014 school year.

As shown in Figure 1, a correlation exists between the walkthrough data and the assessment data in math. As the percentage of walkthrough scores of teachers increased, students scoring in quadrant three decreased in 16 of the 19 schools in this study in math between the first and third quarters. One hundred forty-three total walkthroughs were conducted during the third quarter for math between all 19 schools in this study. The correlation is calculated to be −0.27. The slope is calculated to be −0.27. The correlation and slope were determined by using real statistical data compiled from walkthrough scores and student performance.

The negative correlation seen in math (e.g., as the walkthrough scores went up, the percent of students not making progress went down) in 16 schools is supported by an examination of the raw data from Appendix F, Table F1.

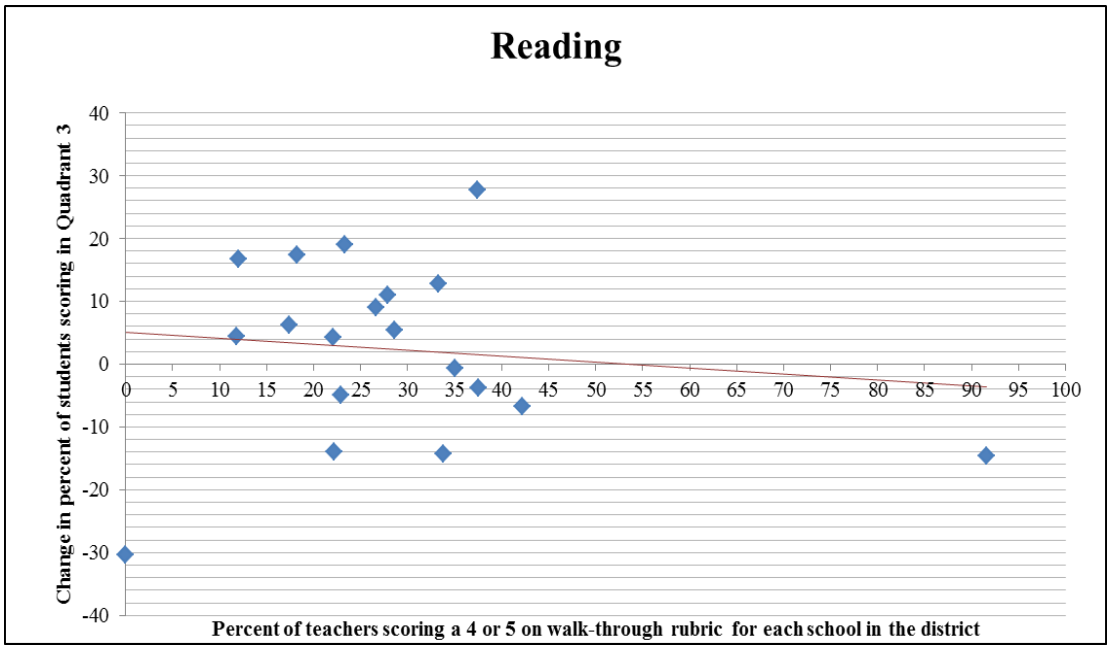

Figure 2. Reading walkthrough scores and student performance. Relationship between walkthrough and change in the percentage of students within the third quadrant of the PGI in reading between the first and third quarters of the 2013–2014 school year.

As shown in Figure 2, a correlation exists between the walkthrough data and the assessment data in reading. As the percentage of walkthrough scores of teachers increased, students scoring in quadrant three decreased in five of the 19 schools in this study in reading between the first and third quarters. Two hundred fifty-four walkthroughs were conducted during the third quarter in reading between all 19 schools in this study. The correlation is calculated to be a −0.12. The slope is calculated to be −0.095. The correlation and slope were determined by using real statistical data compiled from walkthrough scores and student performance.

The negative correlation seen in reading (e.g., as the walkthrough scores went up, the percent of students not making progress went down) in five schools is supported by an examination of the raw data from Appendix F, Table F2.

Summary

Teachers indicated a willingness to embrace the initiatives of the Special Services Department when given opportunities for collaboration, feedback, and time to practice. The linear regression analysis also shows a correlation between assessment data and walkthrough data. The portion of students falling into in quadrant three is decreasing as teacher walkthrough scores are increasing. Sixteen of the 19 schools had a decrease of students in quadrant three overall in math. Five of the 19 schools had a decrease of students in quadrant three overall in reading.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Special education teachers have recently begun to redevelop their teaching practices by using a direct instruction intervention program in their classrooms. Previously, special education teachers created their lessons based according to the expectations of the school or collaborated with other special education teachers within the campus. Now, special education teachers have moved away from working in isolated campus units. The result has been all special education teachers within the Valley School District are part of a professional learning community. They receive ongoing and constant feedback, opportunities for collaboration, and training. This chapter examines the results of the student data and teacher supports and lays out future steps for the program, meeting the needs of all students.

Discussion of Results

The results of the quantitative data reveal there were fewer students in quadrant three in both reading and math assessments at the end of the third quarter. The results of the qualitative data reveal that teachers see benefits to using the direct instruction model and have used the feedback offered to continue using the program with fidelity.

Quantitative Data

Math. The data that revealed a correlation between teacher walkthrough scores and the percentage of students whose scores remained in quadrant three of the PGI is listed in Appendix F, Table F1. The raw data of the 19 schools includes the walkthrough data percentages and the student change in quadrant three percentages in math. The data reveals that 16 of the 19 schools have improved their students' performance in math. The

highest number of students moving out of quadrant 3 was at with School A. School A moved 18 students from quadrant 3. Schools N, P, and Q moved 11, 11, and 15 students respectively from quadrant 3. Uniquely, these three schools were all different grade levels structures. These schools included the middle school (sixth to eighth grade), the elementary school (kindergarten to fifth grade), and the elementary/middle school (kindergarten to eighth grade).

This may show that the trainings and materials, which the teachers received throughout the whole district, were utilized and implemented at all levels. This may also be attributed to the fact that the majority of special education teachers received support, trainings, and materials in math during first quarter of the school year. The teachers then went on to implement the program and moved toward using the program with fidelity based on walkthroughs, professional developments, and increasing familiarity. Teachers had also been meeting collaboratively for professional developments routinely by the point this data were collected. During these professional developments, video clips or photos of teachers using the direct instruction program were shown on a projector, and the teacher was able to share with the group how they have used the program successfully in their classroom.

In addition, by the third quarter of the school year, teachers were receiving a copy of the walkthrough form. District office staff were leaving feedback forms and coaching was becoming an ongoing routine within the district. Special education teachers were beginning to develop a rapport and trust with the staff from the district office. As a result, feedback became more meaningful. In-depth conversations regarding planning,

classroom arrangement, and teaching to fidelity increased as teachers began to see the data which proved that students were moving out of quadrant 3 on district assessments.

This trend of reducing the number of students in quadrant 3 in 16 out of 19 schools serves as a way to build teacher rapport and buy-in from staff. Teacher turnover is ongoing within the VSD. This data will help to immediately develop buy-in from new teachers because it shows to an extent the effectiveness of collaboration, feedback, and time to practice. These are also the same supports that teachers explicitly asked for during the qualitative interviews.

The evidence provided that the initiative for math was modestly successful. The data indicates that in the area of math, as teachers became more familiar in their Levels of Use, and increased their fidelity to the program, the numbers of students in quadrant 3 decreased.

Reading. As noted in the methods section, not all teachers had complete editions of the reading program, including teacher presentation books or student workbooks. Also, trainings were not provided to the same extent or rigor as the math trainings due to the lack of materials. While some teachers had older versions of the reading program, lack of workbooks for all students, teacher books, and trainings resulted in some teachers within the district using other district materials to teach reading.

The data that revealed a correlation between teacher walkthrough scores and the percentage of students whose scores remained in quadrant three of the PGI in reading is listed in Appendix F, Table F2. The raw data of the 19 schools includes the walkthrough data percentages and the student change in quadrant three percentages in reading. The data reveals five of the 19 schools have improved in reading. Schools E, F, H, O, and P

reduced the number of students in quadrant 3 by 7, 5, 4, 2, and 3 respectively. Of note, these five schools are all elementary (kindergarten to fifth grade) schools. Traditionally, elementary schools may have access to additional resources, books, and materials whose readability and content is appropriate for a younger student.

It should also be noted that the data of School F may have skewed the overall reading data because it had a 0% of reading walkthrough scores during quarter 3. During quarter 3 walkthroughs, School F only had walkthroughs conducted during direct instruction math class, yet School F did see a reduced number of students in quadrant 3 by 5 students.

At this time, the implementation of the reading initiative was not yet advanced enough to demonstrate and impact. The data indicates that in the area of reading, as teachers became more familiar in their Levels of Use and increased their fidelity to the program, the numbers of students in quadrant 3 has not decreased.

Qualitative Data

Grounded theory stresses the importance of listening to what participants are saying. Grounded theory is designed to allow the voices of the participants to be heard, and then to understand the place people are at presently and respecting that place. The attitudes of the teachers show a willingness to move forward with implementing fundamental changes if they are sustainable.

As the interviews were examined, the time that teachers spent on describing student success was noteworthy. There were many stories told within the interviews where the teachers suddenly realized the impact that direct instruction and the initiatives are having on the students. Conversations with other classroom teachers, increased test

performance, or overall student attitude were concrete indicators that created buy-in and a hook for the special education teachers to invest and believe in these programs. The story that the teachers told was one of genuine interest in wanting to do what is best for students.

The teachers noted that these initiatives "were a lot to take on," especially as they occurred after the school year had already started and schedules were made, so it was initially met with anxiety because a significant change was occurring. However, as these interviews continued over the year, the biggest turning point in the attitude of the teachers was seeing the student complete a task he was unable to complete previously.

The data from the qualitative interviews shows that teachers have begun to evolve professionally. From the data, the supports deemed most successful within the VSD include collaboration, feedback, and time to practice. These supports are vital to teachers being able to make these changes sustainable and ongoing.

Interview protocol. The three rounds of interviews provided teachers with an extended opportunity to self-reflect on their teaching practices throughout the year. Teachers continued to teach, receive walkthroughs, and attend professional development meetings regarding direct instruction and using a district approved curriculum in between each interview. This allowed for new learning experiences, conversations, and/or reflections to occur in between each interview.

All teachers who participated in the interview process were familiar with the term direct instruction prior to its implementation within the Special Services Department. While teachers had varying degrees of understanding in regards to the definition of direct instruction or using a scripted, structured, and published program, they were familiar with

the concept of providing educational support for students at their instructional or ability level.

Teachers appeared comfortable and willing to share their ideas in a safe and confidential environment. The researcher's relationship with the interviewees helped to facilitate a system of trust, as well as an opportunity to speak freely. Teachers within the interviews had a significant range of teaching experience. As Hall and Hord (2011) examine in the Concerns-Based Adoption Model, changes towards something new and different may and can be met with a sense of apprehension, fear, and uncertainty. However, as the supports continue, as the bigger picture of student achievement is both documented and seen, and as the students continue to achieve additional growth, the teachers became more willing to evolve and to begin moving toward using the programs with fidelity and taking advantage of all available supports.

Limitations

Participation

While all the teachers knew of the researcher in terms of being a colleague, the promise of anonymity was maintained. All responses provided by the teachers were taken as an honest reflection of their thoughts and feelings regarding the initiatives of the Special Services Department.

Bias

The researcher recognizes that bias may exist throughout the study because he is a member of the Special Services Department and had provided teachers throughout the district with support on the stated initiatives. The researcher tried to maintain an objective lens throughout the course of the research by focuses on the research questions,

letting the themes naturally develop through reading the interviews, and recording the results.

Implications for Future Studies

Use of Team Time

The 2015-2016 school year will examine how weekly PLC time evolves amongst grade-level teams. The GVC has resulted in less academic planning for grade-level teams. Teams will have more time to look at data and discuss the needs of individual students.

Support of General Education Teachers

General education teachers are beginning to use the direct instruction program on a daily basis. The 2015-2016 school year will examine how to effectively support general education teachers using direct instruction programs.

Implementation of Reading Program and Instructional Level Growth

While all special education teachers have full inventories of both reading and math direct instruction materials, the district is no longer using the assessment building program and administering quarterly assessments that track instructional level and grade level performance. The district is still administering assessments, but they are based on specific units, made up of grade level standards taught throughout each quarter. The 2015-2016 school year will examine new ways to measure instructional level growth.

Overall Conclusions

This study began by examining how district initiatives can be used to support special education teachers and increase student achievement in the Special Education Department. The district has responded to the federal vision for Results-Driven

Accountability and the state initiatives of an MTSS through implementing four new initiatives.

Teachers are shown to be positive implementers of these initiatives. Data has shown that fidelity to these initiatives may have a positive impact on making one year or more of instructional level growth, specifically in the area of math.

The district is continuing to find ways to provide collaboration, feedback, and time for practice during professional learning community collaboration times. All students have the opportunity to learn with skilled teachers using a program that is designed to teach skills to mastery. The Valley School District has answered the call for Results-Driven Accountability by creating systems intended to ensure learning for *all*.

Epilogue

Next Steps: Continued Collaboration in the Special Services Department

This study originated in 2013–2014 as part of the bigger picture of education from the federal level challenging states to respond to Results-Driven Accountability. Arizona responded by adopting and implementing the MTSS to meet the needs of all learners using a proactive and direct model to support all students.

The Valley School District Special Education Department responded by adopting four initiatives to meet the needs of students and special education teachers. Using a direct instruction program with fidelity, being receptive to feedback, and participating in ongoing professional development has resulted in 16 of the 19 schools showing student growth in the area of math, 15 of the 19 schools showing student growth in reading and math, and 5 of the 19 schools showing student growth in reading. Teachers continue their commitment and work towards fidelity of the program. Teachers have seen instructional level growth as well as connections, growth, and transfer of skills into the general education classroom in both reading and math.

Growth is in the right direction. The results of these initiatives have created consistency and clear expectations throughout the entire district. This consistency is evident, as all special teachers know what is to be taught. The initiatives have created a system that allows for maximum learning time of all students receiving interventions.

Throughout the 2014–2015 school year the line dividing *special education* and *general education* is slowly dissolving. Professional language and attitudes are moving away from labels. A label such as *sped student* or a location like the learning resource center does not limit student support. The labels are dropping off the students. The

previous attitude of general education teachers who considered students receiving special education services as "your (special education teacher) student" not "my student" is evolving into learning for all of "our students." Math Interventionists, Reading Interventionists, and Special Education teachers have begun to share all their students regardless of their label servicing all students requiring intervention. General education teachers are also beginning to use the direct instruction program as part of their daily intervention block, targeting the specific skills of all the students who require instructional level support.

This proactive approach is being accomplished using a method called *Ducks in a Row* throughout the district. This method focuses on taking the time to learn about the student's strengths and needs up front and collecting as much appropriate data as possible. Afterwards, the team of teachers who plans to work with the student reviews his or her data together and makes a proactive decision to select supports and services. The student's data are routinely monitored and reviewed.

Student data was recorded into an online monitoring system to assess growth in reading fluency, math fluency, completion of daily lessons in the direct instruction program, and completion of unit tests within the direct instruction program. Students who do not pass these tests with 80% accuracy receive additional support in the areas needed. Each of these direct instruction programs offers a remediation section that provides additional support to students.

All of the students have taken placement tests, which determined their instructional level and the appropriate direct instruction program. The goals for the program are posted throughout the classroom. Goals may consist of how many lessons

will be taught during each nine week grading period or throughout the year. Students earn points based on group performance and individual performance during each lesson.

During the 2014–2015 school year all reading and math interventionists began to use the direct instruction program along with the special education teachers. Monthly professional development meetings tripled in size as special education teachers, math interventionists, and reading interventionists began to collaborate together. Both new and experienced teachers were given formal trainings, side-by-side coaching, and individualized feedback with consultants representing the direct instruction programs throughout the year.

The Special Services Department has collaborated and worked together with the reading and math departments to establish *tights* for all direct instruction teachers in order to maintain fidelity to the intervention program. Tights are agreed upon expectations. These tights were discussed at the end of the 2014–2015 school year during a professional development meeting. They were agreed upon as best practice by all the teachers involved in this process. Teachers who had questions or concerns were given the opportunity to express their thoughts about the direct instruction tights as a professional learning community.

During the 2015-2016 school year, direct instruction tights will be monitored by the special services support specialists through walkthroughs, feedback, modeling, support, and coaching throughout the school year for all special education, reading, and math interventionists throughout the Valley School District. These tights include:

- Minimum of three reading or math fluency assessments per quarter
- Mastery tests within the direct instruction program (minimum of three per quarter)
- Regular input of data into district instruction student management program
- Use of a point system within the direct instruction program
- Minimum of 45-minute intervention sessions held four days a week
- Commitment to all components within the direct instruction program
- Giving student workbooks to middle school teachers as students transition from elementary to middle school

Collaboration for General Education Teachers

As the 2015–2016 school year begins, the Valley School District will implement a district-wide initiative to meet the needs of all learners. This initiative is called the *Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum* (GVC). The GVC will ensure all students within the district are being taught the same standards during each quarter of the school year. The GVC will also ensure that all teachers know which standards to teach during each quarter of the school year. Over 100 teachers are undertaking the process of creating the GVC. All standards in reading, math, writing, science, and social studies will be analyzed using the *Stars and Stairs* model. This model breaks down all standards into a sequence of specific objectives that all students must be able to master in order to meet the standard. Examples of rigor, questions to ask students, content-level vocabulary, and additional resources are being created.

The Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum Committee identified *priority standards* and *supporting standards* for all grade levels and subject areas. These priority and

supporting standards will be taught as units throughout the year. The district will no longer be using the online assessment builder to administer quarterly assessments. Students will take unit assessments throughout the year. These assessments will require students to explain their answers, moving away from a multiple-choice format. Teachers are collaborating throughout the summer to create these unit assessments.

A yearly pacing guide of what priority standards are to be taught each quarter and an assessment window for the pre-test and post-test is also another part of the Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum. Pacing guides, pre-tests, and post-tests will provide teachers a blueprint of what needs to be taught consistently throughout the district. Teachers will then be able to use their professional learning community time to have meaningful student-driven conversations, examine data, and develop supports for all students.

This initiative creates a systematic model that looks at all the underlying skills required to achieve mastery of the grade-level standards. Teachers will determine which tier or instructional level of support students need by examining student data. These students will then receive supports to meet their instructional level needs, monitor their growth, achieve mastery with instructional level skills, and show progress in meeting grade-level standards.

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APPENDIX A

PROFICIENCY GROWTH INDEX

Proficiency Growth Index Structure

Quadrant 1	**Quadrant 2**
Not Making Instructional Growth Meeting Grade-Level Standard	Making Instructional Growth Meeting Grade-Level Standard
Quadrant 3	**Quadrant 4**
Not Making Instructional Growth Not Meeting Grade-Level Standard	Making Instructional Growth Not Meeting Grade-Level Standard

Note: Students are placed into one of these four quadrants based on their performance on district assessments.

APPENDIX B

WALKTHROUGH FORM

Observation Rubric and Recording Sheet

Teacher_____Date_____ Time in:_____ Time out:_____ Special Services Program Evaluation

Indicator	5	3	1
Clear Learning Objective	The objective is posted and based on district grade level curriculum The objective includes how the learning will be demonstrated or assessed Teacher refers to the objective through out the lesson	The objective is broad The objective does not state how the learning will be assessed Teacher refers to the objective at the beginning of the lesson	Objective is not posted Or The objective is not aligned to grade level curriculum Or Teacher does not refer to the objective
Teacher Modeling	Teacher models components of the objective & lesson in multiple, brief chunks & in a logical, sequential order	Teacher models/lectures on the learning objective in it entirety	Teacher assigns students a task to be completed
Guided Practice	Throughout the lesson, at brief intervals, the teacher allows students to practice, process or apply each chunk of the lesson	The teacher has students practice the learning at the end of the lesson	Teacher does not require students to practice the learning
Checking for Understanding	Teacher checks for understanding at each stage of the lesson at frequent, brief intervals During/after each small chunk of the lesson, teacher uses strategies to quickly assess all students (e.g. calls on a random sample of students; circulates to listen to/observe students' work/answers; has students hold up whiteboards) The teacher does little/no individual "tutoring" during this time After each chunk of instruction, teacher *adjusts instruction* in response to student feedback gathered during "check for understanding"	Teacher checks for understanding with a variety of students at the end of the lesson	Teacher calls only on students who raise their hands Or Does not call on students or monitor student work Or Asks the whole class "Are there any questions? "
A value of 4 indicates that some aspects of both 3 and 5 were observed		A value of 2 indicates that some aspects of both 1and 3 were observed	

Indicator	5	4	3	2	1	Comments
Clear Learning Objective						
Teacher Modeling						
Guided Practice						
Checking for Understanding						

adapted from Schmoker, Mike, (2011) Focus, Alexanria, VA: ASCD

Note: The district adopted this walkthrough form to monitor its use of direct instruction.

APPENDIX C

LEVELS OF USE FIGURE

Level of Use

Nonusers	**Users**
Level 1: Nonuse	Level 5: Routine Use
Level 2: Orientation	Level 6: Refinement
Level 3: Preparation	Level 7: Integration
Level 4: Mechanical Use	Level 8: Renewal

Note: This figure shows the eight levels of use defined by Hall and Hord indicating levels of use. Levels 1–4 are considered nonusers. Levels 5–8 are considered users (SEDL, 2006).

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol for 1st Interview – Conducted in March 2014

1. When you began the school year, were you familiar with direct instruction? How did it compare to the way you were instructing students at the beginning of the year, prior to the initiatives of special services?

2. The special services department presented several new initiatives to start the year. What concerns did you have about incorporating these initiatives into your classroom schedule?

3. As you have begun to implement these initiatives in your classroom, how has your teaching style changed or evolved?

4. How are you using your planning time in order to prepare for the lessons using direct instruction?

5. How have the students responded to direct instruction model?

6. When analyzing student data, have you noticed any results, either positive or negative, in regards to student achievement?

7. What support, training, or materials do you need to continue to implement these initiatives in your classroom?

Interview Protocol for 2nd and 3rd Interviews Conducted in April and May 2014

1. What trends have you observed with your student data, either in the form of classroom assessment through direct instruction assessment, district assessments, or in conversations with the general education teacher?

2. What have you noticed about student engagement when using direct instruction in your classroom?

3. What types of assistance, training, or support do you need to continue with implementation of these initiatives?

Note: This figure contains the interview protocols used during the three interviews.

APPENDIX E

FOUR INITIATIVES OF SPECIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Four Initiatives of the Special Services Department

Initiative 1	Direct Instruction
Initiative 2	District Approved Curriculum
Initiative 3	Walkthroughs
Initiative 4	Professional Development

Note: These are the initiatives of the Valley School District, Special Services Department.

APPENDIX F

COMPARISON OF DATA BY SCHOOL (FIRST-QUARTER TO THIRD-QUARTER)

Table F1: Math Data

School Name	Math: Walkthrough scores for Quarter 3 (Average % of 4s and 5s)	Math: Change in % of students in quadrant 3 from Q3–Q1 district assessment	Correlation	Slope	Math: Did this school have less students in quadrant 3 between Quarter 3–Quarter 1?	If yes, how many less students
School A	56.00	-21.80	−0.2725694	−0.2675513	yes	-18
School B	42.09	-34.00			yes	-8
School C	35.59	12.00			no	2
School D	23.34	-15.50			yes	-7
School E	53.34	0.00			no	1
School F	25.00	-9.00			yes	-2
School G	42.87	-23.00			yes	-5
School H	31.25	-11.33			yes	-3
School I	29.60	-2.00			yes	-1
School J	33.30	-17.29			yes	-5
School K	42.50	-24.00			yes	-3
School L	55.00	-13.00			yes	-3
School M	50.00	-1.00			yes	-6
School N	41.16	-17.67			yes	-11
School O	54.29	-8.33			yes	-2
School P	50.00	-36.67			yes	-11
School Q	15.00	-18.67			yes	-15
School R	50.00	-24.67			yes	-8
School S	15.47	7.71			no	4

Note: This table depicts math data collected from the 19 schools involved within the study.

Table F2: Reading Data

School Name	Reading: Walkthrough scores for Quarter 3 (Average % of 4s and 5s)	Reading: Change in % of students in quadrant 3 from Q3–Q1 district assessment	Correlation	Slope	Reading: Did this school have less students in quadrant 3 between Quarter 3–Quarter 1?	If yes, how many less students
School A	27.91	11.00	−0.12366	−0.09581	no	6
School B	35.00	-0.67			no	2
School C	26.67	9.00			no	2
School D	11.78	4.50			no	2
School E	22.21	-14.00			yes	-7
School F	0.00	-30.33			yes	-5
School G	22.86	-5.00			no	0
School H	33.75	-14.33			yes	-4
School I	18.24	17.33			no	2
School J	33.33	12.86			no	4
School K	37.48	27.67			no	2
School L	22.04	4.33			no	1
School M	23.34	19.00			no	11
School N	37.49	-3.83			no	0
School O	42.19	-6.67			yes	-2
School P	91.60	-14.67			yes	-3
School Q	17.44	6.17			no	5
School R	28.60	5.33			no	2
School S	12.05	16.71			no	10

Note: This table depicts reading data collected from the 19 schools involved within the study.

APPENDIX G

SUPPLEMENTAL AND NON-PRINT MATERIALS

This is a zipped file. It may be opened on a PC or MAC computer. This zipped file is titled, "Supplemental and Non-Print Materials." It contains:

1) Qualitative Interviews-6 Teachers
    a. Teacher 1- 3 transcripts- opens in Microsoft Word
    b. Teacher 2- 3 transcripts- opens in Microsoft Word
    c. Teacher 3- 3 transcripts- opens in Microsoft Word
    d. Teacher 4- 3 transcripts- opens in Microsoft Word
    e. Teacher 5- 3 transcripts- opens in Microsoft Word
    f. Teacher 6- 3 transcripts- opens in Microsoft Word
    g. Transcription Coding.xlsx- opens in Microsoft Excel
2) Quantitative Data
    a. Assessment Data by School.xlsx- opens in Microsoft Excel
    b. Graphs--Q3-Q1 data in reading--math--combined.xlsx- opens in Microsoft Excel
    c. Walkthrough Data by School.docx- opens in Microsoft Word

APPENDIX H

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Kathleen Puckett
Division of Teacher Preparation - West
480/727-5206
Kathleen.Puckett@asu.edu

Dear Kathleen Puckett:

On 3/11/2014 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Supporting Special Education Teachers and Increasing Student Achievement Through Multi-Faceted and Systematic Initiatives
Investigator:	Kathleen Puckett
IRB ID:	STUDY00000767
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Consent Document.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Supporting Special Education Teachers and Increasing Student Achievement.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • Walkthrough Rubric.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Prior Approval.pdf, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • Interview Questions.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Recruitment Script.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (1) Educational settings, (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 3/11/2014.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: John Hecht
John Hecht